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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [IT](#) [IZ](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AFGHANISTAN](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ/ITALY: PARLIAMENT APPROVES FUNDING FOR  
ITALY'S MILITARY MISSIONS ABROAD, INCLUDING IN IRAQ

REF: A. ROME 537

[B](#). ROME 902

[C](#). ROME 886

Classified By: POL MINCOUNS THOMAS COUNTRYMAN,  
REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: On March 15, the Italian Chamber of Deputies gave final approval to extend through June 30 funding for Italy's military mission in Iraq. We expect funding to be extended for the July-December period without difficulty, given the size of the Government's majority. The subsequent vote, to extend funding for January-July 2006, will be less predictable, given national elections in spring of that year. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (U) On March 15, the Italian Chamber of Deputies gave final approval to extend funding for all of Italy's military missions abroad, including, in a separate vote, its mission to Iraq. The Senate passed these measures in February (Ref A). This vote authorizes funding for the period January 1-June 30, 2005; funding for overseas military missions is always extended in six-month increments. Procedurally, the government authorizes funding by decree early in a period, and the decree must then be approved by Parliament within 60 days. This explains why the decree funding the current period was not approved until now. Total funding approved for Italy's Iraq mission was just under 18.8 million Euro. Center-right governing coalition parties were joined by the small Union of Democrats for Europe (UDEUR), nominally with the left, in passing the Iraq funding. That measure received a total vote of 246 in favor, 180 against, with eight abstentions.

[3](#). (U) The Chamber also considered two non-binding recommendations. The first, sponsored by governing coalition partner Union of Christian Democrats of the Center (UDC), urged the Government to enhance the EU's "united commitment" toward the constitutional process in Iraq and the role of the UN and to promote an international conference on Iraq based on the model of the November 2004 Sharm-al Sheik Conference. The resolution also urged the Government to "define the procedures and timetable for the return of the Italian contingent in Iraq, within the framework of decisions that will be adopted in the UN Security Council and together with the Iraqi authorities, for the gradual withdrawal of foreign military troops from Iraq." There were 218 votes in favor of the resolution, 26 against, 25 abstentions. (Note: All votes took place before PM Berlusconi's televised remarks concerning a possible Italian troop withdrawal beginning in September, Refs B and C.) The center-left Democrats of the Left (DS) and Daisy parties did not participate in the vote, a tactical maneuver which lessens the number of votes needed for a majority and is more supportive than voting against a measure.

[4](#). (SBU) The Italian Communist Party (PdCI) presented the second non-binding resolution before the Chamber of Deputies, urging the Government to "assess the opportuneness of deciding the withdrawal of the Italian military contingent in Iraq," given the "extremely tragic characteristics" of developments there (including, but not limited to, the killing of Italian intelligence officer Nicola Calipari) and the "spiral of violence" spreading in the Middle East. As with similar motions during previous debates on extending funding for the Iraq mission, the Chamber voted down the PdCI resolution by 229 against, 15 for, and 20 abstentions, with DS and Daisy again not participating. (The call for withdrawal of troops consistently splits the opposition. While they have found ways to justify a vote against funding, even in the wake of the successful January elections in Iraq, more centrist members of the left acknowledge that a withdrawal of troops would be disastrous for the Iraqi people.) In the same television show in which Berlusconi later made his announcement of a possible Italian troop drawdown, the Prime Minister praised the opposition's "responsible" stance in Parliament.

[5](#). (C) COMMENT: The opposition was shocked by Berlusconi's May 15 remarks, interpreted as a promise to withdraw Italian troops in September, in part because they came on television, not in Parliament, on a day which had witnessed a fairly unacrimonious vote on the Italian troop presence in Iraq. "Had Berlusconi said in Parliament what he said on

(television)," Daisy leader Francesco Rutelli told

journalists, "It would have been different. ... We would, for example, have voted in favor of a motion indicating an exit strategy from Iraq," Rutelli added, suggesting his party might have voted with the majority. The PM's March 17 clarifications of his statement (see March 17 entry on Rome's Siprnet site), which urged the media to review his exact words on the program, further confounded the opposition, according to most analysts. It has been an intriguing bit of electoral politicking by Berlusconi.

16. (C) Looking ahead, we do not foresee difficulties for the Government when the time comes to renew funding for the Iraqi mission for the July-December period this year. As with all funding votes since Italy began participating in Iraqi reconstruction, we expect the Government's majority to hold fast and the left to vote against, with few, if any, splinters on either side. The subsequent vote to renew funding for January-July 2006 becomes more problematic for governing coalition partners. The national election campaign will be close to full swing and there will be increasing pressure on politicians to respond to the majority of the Italian public that opposes the country's military presence in Iraq. END COMMENT.

17. (U) Minimize considered, Embassy Baghdad.

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